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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CHISINAU 000801

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/UMB, DS/IP/EUR

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TAGS: PGOV PREL MARR PBTS EAID PINR MD

SUBJECT: GRENADE EXPLOSION DURING CHISINAU
FESTIVITIES

Classified by: DCM Marcus Micheli for reasons 1.4
(b) and (d)

¶11. (C) Summary: On the evening of October 14, while some 50-100,000 people were in the town center celebrating the Chisinau Day holiday, a grenade exploded, injuring over 40 persons. No lives were lost. Minister of Interior Catan told the Ambassador October 15 that he believed that this incident was the work of "Bolshevik elements" inside Moldova, possibly based in Transnistria. At about the same time as the explosion, the office of Prime Minister Filat reported having received two threatening phone calls demanding that the GoM stop all political and economic reforms. The Minister said a separate incident on October 15, in which a man threatened to explode a grenade, was unrelated and involved a personal matter. At this point it is still too early to say who was to blame for the blast, and what their motivation was. The Minister welcomed the Ambassador's offer to provide FBI agents to assist with the investigation of this incident. End Summary.

Grenade Explosion at Chisinau Festivities

¶12. (SBU) While some 50-100,000 people were in the town square on the evening of October 14 celebrating Chisinau Day, a grenade explosion went off at 10:08 P.M. The blast injured over 40 persons, of whom 37 were taken to the hospital. Most were only lightly wounded with scratches and bruises, but 12 remained in the hospital overnight, of whom three were more seriously wounded and one required surgery. No lives were lost nor are any in danger now. The crowd was listening to a rock concert which continued uninterrupted. Mayor Chirtoaca and police officials later explained to the press that the concert was deliberately allowed to continue in order to avoid mass panic among the large crowd assembled.

¶13. (SBU) The Minister of Interior, SIS Director and Procurator General gave a press conference on the morning of October 15 to discuss the explosion. While both Procurator General Zubco and Minister of Interior Catan acknowledged that they were still investigating and that the perpetrators had not been identified, both referred to the incident as "possibly a terrorist act." They reported evidence that an RG-42 military grenade was used. Zubco noted that the RG-42 has a blast radius of about 20 meters, and said that it was not clear yet if the explosion was carried out by an individual or a group.

Man with Grenade Threatens Explosion

¶4. (SBU) In a separate and apparently unrelated incident, a man with a grenade walked up to the Prosecutor General's Office (PGO) at about 11:00 on October 15 and threatened to blow himself up together with the prosecutor. The two events are linked only in that the man appeared outside the PGO building a half hour before the scheduled press conference about last night's blast. The man, who has been identified as Leonid Zubin, demanded the release from jail of his son, Denis Zubin, who has been imprisoned for seven years for homicide. Police blocked traffic, isolated the individual and defused the incident, after which journalists were allowed into the PGO building for the scheduled press conference.

Threats to Prime Minister Filat's Office

¶5. (SBU) On the evening of October 14, at around the same general time as the grenade explosion in the central square, the office of Prime Minister Filat reported receiving two threatening phone calls from unknown persons. The threat calls were received by the security officer on duty and the information was sent to the investigators handling the explosion case. At the October 15 press conference, Minister of Interior Catan

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reported that the telephone threats referred to stopping government reforms.

Minister of Interior Blames "Bolsheviks"

¶6. (C) In a meeting with the Ambassador on October 15, Minister Catan opined that the grenade incident was likely the work of "Bolshevik elements" internal to Moldova, possibly youth organizations based in Transnistria who were trying to destabilize Moldova. He gave no concrete evidence to support such a link to Transnistria, only indicating that he supposed such elements were the most likely for such an attack. Catan stated that this opinion was shared by SIS director and PGO. Catan noted that if the investigation proved that the event was purely criminal with no political motivation, then he would reclassify it as "hooliganism."

¶7. (C) Catan further told the Ambassador that he told the press conference the grenade attack was considered more terrorist than criminal because it was linked with the fact that the same evening Filat's office had received two threatening calls demanding Filat stop all political and economic reforms. Catan said that even before the new government took over the organs of power they had begun receiving "threats," such as that, "the Prut River will be full of bodies." He noted that Moldova had extreme organizations, with Transnistrian origins, trying to destabilize the situation.

¶8. (C) Catan also suggested a link between the explosion and the recent protests of pensioners in front of City Hall, who he blamed for blocking the streets. Catan said that these people would "do anything" to find fault with the current administration. He reiterated that transnationals were not involved, just "domestic political

extremists."

¶9. (C) Catan definitively ruled out any connections between the grenade explosion October 14 and the incident in front of the Prosecutor General's Office the morning of the 15th. He noted that the grenades involved were similar, but that they were of different generations, and hence different origins.

Catan Welcomes USG Assistance

¶10. (SBU) Catan welcomed the Ambassador's offer of USG assistance in investigating this incident. Following the meeting, the RSO contacted LegAtt in Bucharest, who will contact FBI headquarters in Washington regarding assistance.

¶11. (SBU) On a separate matter, Catan was also receptive to a proposal to bring in a consultant to review the Ministry of Interior operations.

Comment

¶12. (C) It is too early to say whether the holiday grenade attack was hooliganism or a terrorist act. Some observers have noted that political forces unhappy with the Alliance would stand to benefit from the fear created, but at this point no one can say who organized the attack. In a situation that is already politically polarized, both the explosion and the Minister's comments may further the divide.

CHAUDHRY